

# **Committee on International Relations**

## **Subcommittee on Europe and Emerging Threats**

### **Statement of Chairman Elton Gallegly**

#### **The EU Constitution and U.S.-EU Relations: The Recent Referenda in France and the Netherlands and the U.S.-EU Summit**

June 22, 2004

Today, the Subcommittee on Europe and Emerging Threats is holding a hearing on the EU Constitution and U.S.-EU relations after the recent referenda in France and the Netherlands and the U.S.-EU Summit.

French and Dutch voters rejected the EU Constitution in national referenda on May 29<sup>th</sup> in France and June 1<sup>st</sup> in the Netherlands. Following these “NO”-votes, the status of the EU Constitution and the future of the European Union have been thrown into question. Commentators have suggested that these votes were the result of a variety of factors, including the threat to traditional social protections by changing economic circumstances, the democratic disconnect between the EU institutional bureaucracy and the general public, and continued EU enlargement – especially relating to Turkey. Others have suggested that the referenda results should only be attributed to voter dissatisfaction with unpopular national governments and policies.

These difficulties with ratifying the EU constitution are calling into question the further integration and expansion of the EU. There are debates about whether the ratification process should continue. There is speculation that further integration may be reassessed, or even reconfigured. Many European officials have suggested that it may be necessary to slow the pace of EU enlargement. However, others would argue that the prospect of EU membership has been the most effective means of maintaining stability in volatile regions such as southeastern Europe, and freezing further enlargement could undercut one of Europe’s great strategic accomplishments.

At the U.S.-EU Summit on Monday, President Bush stated (and I quote): “The United States continues to support a strong European Union as a partner in spreading freedom and democracy, and security, and prosperity throughout the world.” President Bush was the first U.S. President to conduct meetings with the institution of the European Union in Brussels, in February of this year. When he travels to Scotland next month for the Group of Eight summit, Mr. Bush will be making his fourth visit to Europe in the past six months. It is clear that the President wants a strong European partner.

At the U.S.-EU Summit on Monday, European leaders sought to reassure the President that the recent constitutional turmoil would not stop the EU from playing a strong role on important issues such as Iraq, Iran, the Middle East peace process and counterterrorism.

Considering all of these issues, and all that has happened in the past month, the Subcommittee has invited our two distinguished witnesses, Ambassador Conzemius and Ambassador Bruton, to discuss these developments, and to perhaps shed some light on what they expect the future may hold.

I look forward to hearing from our two guests, the two Ambassadors, and I will now turn to Mr. Wexler for any remarks he may wish to make.